11. *Gandhi and* Khadi, *the Fabric of Indian Independence*

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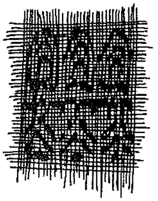

Cloth was central to the Indian struggle for national self-government—cloth as an economic product and cloth as a medium of communication. Cloth was officially incorporated into the nationalist program in 1921 when the Indian National Congress resolved to campaign for the boycott of foreign cloth, to require its officers and workers to spin cotton yarn and wear hand-spun, hand-woven cloth (*khadi*), and to adopt a flag with the spinning wheel in the center. Mahatma Gandhi was the force behind the adoption of these resolutions, but they were successful because Gandhi had achieved an understanding of the role of cloth in Indian life, the culmination of decades of experimentation with cloth as a medium of communication and means of livelihood.

Gandhi's changing sociopolitical identity can be traced through his costume changes as well as through his speeches, writings, and activities. As he came to appreciate the semiotic properties of cloth, he learned to use it to communicate his most important messages to followers and opponents and to manipulate social events. Once he had appreciated the economic importance of cloth in India, he made it the centerpiece of his program for independence and self-government. The development of Gandhi's thought and practice, which is explored in the following pages, is illuminated by the historical and cultural context provided in Cohn (this volume) and Bayly (1986). Cohn analyzes the use of costume in the reorganization and management of hierarchical relations during the British Raj. Bayly provides valuable insights into the role of cloth in Indian culture, emphasizing its moral nature—its capacity to embody and transmit social value—a characteristic of cloth which Gandhi appreciated.

LESSONS IN THE SOCIAL MEANING OF COSTUME

When Mohandas K. Gandhi disembarked at Southampton in 1888, he was wearing white flannels given to him by a friend and saved especially for the occasion, because he "thought that white clothes would suit [him] better when [he] stepped ashore" (Gandhi 1957:43). On his arrival at Southampton he realized that white flannels were not worn in late September. Later he replaced his Bombay-style clothing, which he thought "unsuitable for English society" (Gandhi 1957:50), with an evening suit from Bond Street, patent leather shoes with spats, and a high silk hat, "clothes regarded as the very acme of fashion" (Fischer 1982:37). Gandhi was sensitive to the connection between costume and social status, and perceived that changes in social position required changes in costume. His sensitivity became self-consciousness because Gandhi, the student from India, was so ignorant of how Gandhi, the London barrister, should appear.

In 1891 when Gandhi returned home to Rajkot, a barrister, he promoted the westernization of his household, begun for him by his brother, by adding items of European dress (Gandhi 1957:92). Gandhi believed his success was dependent on westernization. Later, in the harsher, more repressive, and openly racist South Africa where he went to work as a barrister in 1893, he confronted his indelible Indianness.

On this third day in South Africa, he visited the Durban court. It was explained to him that Hindus had to remove their turbans in court, though Muslim Indians were permitted to keep their turbans on. Turbans were not like hats: In this context, removal was not deferential, it was demeaning (see Cohn, this volume). Gandhi

thought he could solve the problem by wearing an English hat, but his employer warned him that he would be undermining efforts for recognition of the Indian meaning of the turban and for permission to keep it on in court. His employer added, in appreciation of Indian dress: "An Indian turban sits well on your head." Besides, he said, "If you wear an English hat you will pass for a waiter" (Gandhi 1957:108). (Most waiters in South Africa were Indian converts to Christianity who wore English dress.)

Gandhi kept his turban and began to appreciate the limits of his Englishness—limits imposed by the colonial regime and by his pride as an Indian and a Hindu. But still he thought he could make his Indianness compatible with Englishness. He wore a fashionable frock coat, pressed trousers, and shining shoes with his turban (Fischer 1982:57). After he was thrown off the train to Pretoria for traveling first class, he reapplied for a first-class ticket, presenting himself to the station master "in faultless English dress" (Gandhi 1957:116). He succeeded. The station master said, "I can see you are a gentleman" (Gandhi 1957:117).

Gandhi later also succeeded in persuading the railway authorities to issue first- and second-class tickets to Indians "who were properly dressed" (Gandhi 1957:128). He sought to demonstrate that Indians could be as civilized as Englishmen and therefore were entitled to the same rights and privileges as citizens of the British Empire. This belief seemed to be supported by the Empress Victoria herself, who stated that there was a distinction between "aliens and subjects of Her Majesty [and] between the most ignorant and the most enlightened of the natives of India. Among the latter class there are to be found gentlemen whose position and attainments fully qualify them for all the duties and privileges of citizenship" (Queen Victoria, quoted in Erikson 1969:172–3).

When Gandhi brought his family to South Africa in 1896 he believed "that in order to look civilized, our dress and manners had as far as possible to approximate to the European standard. Because, I thought, only thus could we have some influence, and without influence it would not be possible to serve the community. I therefore determined the style of dress for my wife and children. How could I like them to be known as Kathiawad Banias? The Parsis used then to be regarded as the most civilized people amongst Indians, and so, when the complete European style seemed to be unsuited, we adopted the Parsi style. Accordingly my wife wore the Parsi sari, and the boys the Parsi coat and trousers. Of course no one could be without shoes and stockings. It was long before my wife and children could get used to them. The shoes cramped their feet and the stockings stank with perspiration" (Gandhi 1957:186).

Soon the prospect began to fade that one could be an Indian and a full citizen of the British empire by wearing Indian headgear with an English suit. For one thing, it had become clear that the color of one's skin was as much a part of one's costume as a frock coat, and this fundamental Indianness Gandhi would not have changed even if he could. He began to admire Indian dress. In 1901, back in India for a visit, he met some rulers of Indian states at the India Club in Calcutta. Gandhi recalls, "In the Club I always found them wearing fine Bengalee *dhotis* [Hindu garments of seamless cloth, wrapped and folded around the lower body] and shirts and scarves. On the darbar day [Viceroy's audience] they put on trousers befitting *khansamas* [waiters] and shining boots. I was pained and inquired of one of them the reason for the change. "We alone know our unfortunate condition [began the reply]. We alone know the insults we have to put up with, in order that we may possess our wealth and titles. . . .' 'But what about these *khansama* turbans and these shining boots?' I asked. 'Do you see any difference between *khansamas* and us?' he replied, and added, 'They are our *khansamas*, we are Lord Curzon's *khansamas*. If I were to absent myself from the levee, I should have to suffer the consequences. If I were to attend it in my usual dress, it would be an offence'" (Gandhi 1957:230). As in the Durban court, the sartorial dictates of the Empire were demeaning for its Indian citizens (see Cohn, this volume). During the same visit he remarked on his mentor, Gokhale: "In the Congress I had seen him in a coat and trousers, but I was glad to find him wearing a Bengal *dhoti* and shirt [at home]. I liked his simple mode of dress though I myself then wore a Parsi coat and trousers" (Gandhi 1957:234). Gandhi began to experiment with his own costume. Soon he embarked on a tour of India to learn about its people; he traveled third class. For clothing he took a long woolen coat, a *dhoti*, and a shirt. But on his return to Bombay in 1902 he resumed the life of the well-dressed, well-housed barrister riding first class on the trains.

Gandhi's responses to the costumes of others and his experiments with his own attire indicate a growing awareness of the meaning of clothes—their importance as indicators of status, group identity, social stratification, and political beliefs. He had begun to doubt the possibility of being both a dignified Indian and an English gentleman. The sartorial requirements of the Empire forced Indians to humiliate themselves, and revealed the true relationship—of master and slave—between the English and the Indians. Gandhi's experiments with simple, inexpensive Indian garments expressed his growing disdain for possessions and his growing identification with the poor.

By 1908 he had come to believe that Indians could not be Englishmen and that India should be ruled for the benefit of India by Indians. He set forth these views in *Hind Swaraj* (*Indian Home Rule*) (1908), where he also said: "If people of a certain country, who have hitherto not been in the habit of wearing much clothing, boots, etc., adopt European clothing, they are supposed to have become civilized out of savagery" (Gandhi 1922:32). He himself had believed this when in 1893 he appealed to the railroad authorities to allow Indians in European dress to ride first class, and in 1896 when he brought his family to South Africa and insisted on the further westernization of their dress. By 1908, he no longer believed that European garments were an index of civilization and Indian ones of its lack.

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi first articulated the importance for India of the economics of cloth. For fifty years, an economic nationalism (whose roots were in fact much older) had been evolving in India. British rule had not benefited India, as the British maintained. On the contrary, British rule had destroyed the economy of India by taking its wealth back to England, by overtaxing its farmers, and by destroying Indian industries that might compete with English ones, thus causing poverty, famine, and disease. Cloth manufacture had been the premier industry of India and its decline was a chief cause of Indian poverty. These views were set out in detail in R.C. Dutt's two-volume *Economic History of India* (Dutt 1901 & 1903). Gandhi commented in *Hind Swaraj*: "When I read Mr. Dutt's *Economic History of India* I wept; and, as I think of it, again my heart sickens. . . . It is difficult to measure the harm that Manchester [the seat of the English mechanized textile industry] has done to us. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared" (Gandhi 1922:105).

From 1908 on, these two elements—the economics of cloth and the semiotics of cloth—united in Gandhi's thought. By 1921, *khadi* (homespun cloth) had become central to his politics. The intervening years were full of experiments with costume and with the production of handmade cloth.

CLOTH IN ECONOMIC NATIONALISM

Gandhi's campaign for *khadi* was a product of economic nationalism. Gandhi's views on cloth and clothing were unique, but the elements of which they were composed were not. According to the economic nationalists, India's decline was due largely to British destruction of Indian manufactures beginning in the late eighteenth century. Cotton textiles had been India's premier industry. Weavers and dyers so excelled in producing both coarse , inexpensive textiles and fine, exquisitely dyed, luxury textiles that Indian cloth was prized in Rome, China, Egypt, and Southeast Asia.

> As early as 200 B.C. the Romans used a Sanskrit word for cotton (Latin, *carbasina*, from Sanskrit *karpasa*). In Nero's reign, delicately translucent Indian muslins were fashionable in Rome under such names as *nebula* and *venti* textiles (woven winds) the latter exactly translating the technical name of a special type of muslin woven in Bengal up to the modern period. . . .The quality of Indian dyeing, too, was proverbial in the Roman world, as we know from a reference in St. Jerome's fourth century Latin translation of the Bible, Job being made to say that wisdom is even more enduring than the "dyed colors of India" (Irwin 1962).

In the fifth century A.D. an Indonesian diplomatic mission carried textiles from India and Gandhara to China. In the eleventh century, "500 Jewish families on their way to settle in the Northern Sung capital of China, bought cotton goods in India to take as gifts" (Gittinger 1982:13). Fifteenth-century fragments of Indian cloth found at Fostat, near Cairo, show that the trade was not exclusively in fine textiles. The fragments are "often lacking in care or precision [in dye craftsmanship] and only occasionally showing exceptional skill. Inescapable is the sense that these were made for a modest clientele and do not represent elements of a 'luxury' trade" (Gittinger 1982:33).

Until the sixteenth century, Indian and Arab merchants dominated the trade in Indian cottons. From the late sixteenth century, Europeans gained increasing control of the world trade in Indian cottons (Chaudhuri 1978). At first European traders were interested in Indian cottons as trade goods which could be exchanged in Southeast Asia for spices. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the traders had discovered that if they supervised the design of the textiles made in India, these could be sold at a reasonable profit in London. At the end of the seventeenth century, the demand for Indian painted cottons had become so great that France banned chintz imports to protect its own silk industry (Irwin and Brett 1970:3,4). England followed suit a few years later. So popular were these fabrics that the prohibitions were ignored. In 1720 "a second prohibition was introduced . . . to forbid 'the Use and Wearing in Apparel' of imported chintz, and also its 'use or wear in or about any Bed, Chair, Cushion, or other Household furniture'" (Irwin and Brett 1970:5).

The great popularity of Indian cottons was due both to the cheapness and to the superiority of Indian products. Indian handspun yarns were superior to those produced in England and were imported for the weaving of fine cloth. Indian dyers were expert in the technology of mordant dyeing, which produced washable cottons in vibrant colors (Chaudhuri 1978:237ff). While the competition from Indian cloth could be fought with duties and prohibitions, the technological superiority remained unchallenged until the industrial revolution.

From the late eighteenth century, with the development and growth of machine spinning and weaving and the adoption and modification of Indian cotton-dyeing technology (Gittinger 1982:19), England began to produce quantities of inexpensive cotton textiles. English political control of India permitted adjustments in tariffs (and import prohibitions) to assure the advantage of Lancashire cottons in trade. English cotton-spinning mills secured supplies of raw cotton from India, and British traders succeeded in competing in India with the local hand-loom industry, thus opening a vast new market for the products of the Lancashire mills. The hand-spinning of cotton yarns had virtually died out in India by 1825. Only the highest counts of cotton yarns could not be reproduced by machinery. Even Indian hand-loom weavers used the cotton yarns produced in Lancashire. During the nineteenth century, exports fell drastically and the world's greatest exporter of cottons became a major importer of cotton yarns and piece goods. "In the first four years of the nineteenth century, in spite of all prohibitions and restrictive duties, six to fifteen thousand bales [of cotton piece-goods] were annually shipped from Calcutta to the United Kingdom. . . . After 1820 the manufacture of cotton piece-goods declined steadily, never to rise again" (Dutt 1906:296). Between 1849 and 1889, the value of British cotton cloth exports to India increased from just over 2 million pounds a year to just less than 27 million pounds a year (Chandra 1968:55). At the end of the nineteenth century, the development in Europe of inexpensive, easier-to-apply chemical dyes dealt the final blow to Indian technological superiority in textile production.

The interpretation of these changes has long been a subject of heated debate among historians and economists. Did British cloth destroy the demand for Indian hand-looms or supplement it? Did indigenous production really decline or was it simply consumed in the domestic market? Did British policy destroy Indian manufactures or was the demise of Indian industry the inevitable result of the competition between artisans and machines? Did India fail to industrialize because British policy prevented it or because Indian society was infertile soil for industrialization?

During the late nineteenth century, an interpretation of England's economic relations with India evolved that became the economic basis of Indian nationalism. In this economic nationalism, the history of cotton production and trade was central. Especially significant was the transformation of India from the world's most advanced producer of cotton textiles to an exporter of raw cotton and an importer of cloth.

Dadabhai Naoroji was the recognized leader of this movement and codified the theory of economic nationalism. In his view, "the continuous impoverishment and exhaustion of the country" (Naoroji 1887) was unquestionably the result of British rule. Wealth was taken from India to pay the Englishmen in London who ruled India and to pay large salaries and pensions to English civil servants, who spent much of this wealth in England. Grinding poverty and severe famines resulted from the enormous tax burden on the cultivators. British protection of English industries, through trade advantages in the structure of tariffs, destroyed indigenous artisanry and prevented the development of machine industry.

Naoroji and other early nationalists (e.g., Ranade, Tilak, Gokhale) believed that the low tariffs on British yarns and cloth coming into India and the high tariffs on Indian textiles taken out of India caused the decline of the textile industry, forced more people onto the land, and created an unbalanced economy that exacerbated the poverty of India. Furthermore, they believed that the tariff structure on cotton goods revealed the true nature of British rule:

> Be that as it may, as regards this question of the cotton duties, the mask has now fallen off the foreign English administration of India. The highest officials in the country, nay the entire official body and the leading newspapers in England, have had to make the humiliating confession—The boast in which we have been so long indulging, the boast that we govern India in the interest and for the welfare of the Indians, is perfectly unfounded; India is held and governed in the interests of the English merchants (*The Bangabasi*, 17 March 1894, quoted in Chandra 1966:235).

The national leadership united on this issue, and on the importance of protection for India's artisans and nascent industries. Moreover, for the first time they united in action, around the issue of cotton tariffs. In 1896 they urged the boycott of foreign goods (Chandra 1966:250). The tactic of appealing to the English government of India to practice what it preached—just government—had begun to give way to active opposition. The seeds of opposition, the idea of *swadeshi* (the promotion of indigenous products), had already been planted:

> In 1872 Justice Ranade delivered a series of public lectures at Poona on economic topics, in which he popularized "the idea of *swadeshi*, of preferring the goods produced in one's own country even though they may prove to be dearer or less satisfactory than finer foreign products." These celebrated lectures so inspired the listeners that several of them including Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi . . . and Vasudeo Phadke . . . enthusiastically "vowed to wear and use only swadeshi articles." Joshi used to spin yarn daily for his own *dhoti*, shirt and turban; he started shops at several places to popularise and propagate *swadeshi* goods, and, at the Delhi Durbar of 1877 and in the midst of pageantry and flamboyancy, he represented the Sarvajanik Sabha dressed in pure self-spun khadi (Chandra 1966:122–3).

Indians could fight the destructive power of the English government by using Indian products in preference to foreign ones. The ideology and practice of *swadeshi* grew among nationalists and then, when the English government of India imposed excise duties on Indian cloth, *swadeshi* promoters turned to their most powerful weapon, boycott. In 1896, many people in Dacca resolved to boycott Manchester cloth and to patronize Indian mills (Chandra 1966:126). The center of activity was the Bombay Presidency, home of the nascent textile industry (the first mill opened only in the 1850s). Indians showed their opposition to English clothing by refusing to buy it or wear it, and by burning it. "According to the *Nyaya Sindu* of 2 March 1896 huge bundles of English clothing were thrown into the Holi fire that year" (Chandra 1966:130,n.167). A *Times* correspondent reported that "It was impossible for a respectable citizen to go with a new English piece of cloth without being asked a hundred perplexing questions" (Chandra 1966:130). Even though agitation subsided in subsequent years, *swadeshi*, the promotion of indigenous products, with cloth as its main platform, became a permanent feature of the nationalist movement.

English cloth had become the most potent symbol of English political domination and economic exploitation. As cloth is used mainly in clothing, the results of English exploitation—the demise of indigenous industry—were constantly there for all to see, on the backs of Indians who wore Manchester cloth made into British-style garments, and on Indians who used Manchester cloth for turbans, *kurtas* (shirts), *saris*, and other Indian garments. *Swadeshi*, an attempt to revive and promote Indian industry, required that each person be counted as a patriot-nationalist or a supporter of English domination and exploitation. An individual's political views, encoded in his or her costume, were exposed to public view.

Indeed, part of the reason for the decline of the *swadeshi* movement was the difficulty in procuring, and resistance to wearing, *swadeshi* costume. In the late nineteenth century, the Indian mills and handloom weavers together did not have the capability to clothe the nation. More significantly, most nationalist leaders, including Gokhale and Naoroji (but not the more militant Tilak), continued to wear English costumes with Indian headgear in public. They still believed that the way to gain a just administration of India was to show the English rulers the errors of their ways, so that English fair play and justice would prevail, Indians would be given a greater voice in the government of their land, and artisanry and industry would be revived. Like Gandhi when he appealed to the railway authorities in South Africa in 1893, they seemed to believe that they had to show their English rulers that they were like the English, that they were English gentlemen, and were entitled to all that the English government would give to its own people.

Thus a fascinating paradox was generated from the semiotic and economic characteristics of cloth. These early nationalists wanted to revive and modernize Indian manufactures, especially the textile industry. But their political beliefs stood in the way of utilizing its products. Cloth is made to be worn and to express the social identity of its wearer. They expressed their belief in English values and their right to English justice by comporting themselves as English gentlemen in English dress (albeit with a special hat or turban to signify a slight cultural distinctiveness). Because they were still committed to this Englishness of dress, they were incapable of carrying out their own program of *swadeshi*.

Gandhi, following the lead of Tilak, Joshi and others, came to the more radical position that to promote Indian industry, foreign notions of civilization and gentlemanliness would have to be discarded. Economic Indianization was intrinsically connected to sociocultural Indianization. One could not promote the Indian textile industry without wearing its products and one could not wear its products and remain a proper Englishman. And if one gave up frock coats and morning suits, one would no longer be an English gentleman entitled to treatment as such. A new strategy would be required to achieve the nationalists' goals for India, a strategy based more on confrontation and opposition than on persuasion and cooperation.

THE MAHATMA AS SEMIOTICIAN

Gandhi began his conscious experimentation with costume on his trip to India in 1901. He had begun to question the political efficacy of gentlemanly dress. The experiments intensified during the *satyagraha* (truth force) campaign of militant non-violence in South Africa, from the 1906 opposition to the Black Act until his departure in 1914. In 1909, when Gandhi settled at Tolstoy Farm, he is said to have put on "laborer's dress"—workman's trousers and shirt in the European style, which were adapted from prison uniform (Nanda 1958:109). There is a photograph of him during the *satyagraha* campaign wearing *lungi* (South Indian wrapped lower garment), *kurta* and coat. His head and feet are bare; he carries a staff and a bag slung across his shoulders. This costume was similar to the one he wore on his third-class pilgrimage through India in 1901. The transformation was so radical and unfamiliar that the Reverend Andrews, who arrived to join the movement in 1913, did not recognize the "man in a *lungi* and *kurta* with close cropped head and a staff in hand," reported Prabhudas Gandhi who added "probably he took him for a *sadhu* (ascetic holy man)" (Gandhi, P. 1957:176).

That same year, after being released from jail, he attended a meeting in Durban in a *dhoti* (perhaps a *lungi*). His feet were bare and he had shaved his moustache. He was in mourning for the dead coal strikers (Ashe 1968:124). However, when he sailed for England in 1914 he was dressed as an Englishman (Fischer 1982:151), and when he landed in India the following year he was dressed as a Kathiawari (Gujarat) peasant, in *dhoti*, *angarkha* (robe), upper cloth, and turban, the most thoroughly Indian of his costumes. His *satyagrahi* garb was his own design, and expressed simplicity, asceticism, and identity with the masses. His Kathiawari dress was more formal. It identified his region of origin and presented him as a totally Indian gentleman. In his autobiography he comments on this costume "with my Kathiawadi cloak, turban and *dhoti*, I looked somewhat more civilized than I do today" (1982:374). The costume was an attempt to provide an Indian resolution for the contradiction between being civilized and being Indian.

His colleagues were not sure what to make of him. He "was an eccentric figure, with his huge white turban and white clothing, among the western attired delegates" (Gold 1983:63). By appearing in this eccentric fashion he forced his colleagues to notice and accommodate his view of a truly Indian nationalism. He deliberately used costume not only to express his sociopolitical identity, but to manipulate social occasions to elicit acceptance of, if not agreement with, his position.

Despite the thoroughgoing Indianness of his Kathiawari costume (actually because of it) it was inadequate for Gandhi's purposes because it indicated region, class, and religion. Gandhi's program called for the unity of all Indians throughout the subcontinent, rich and poor, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim. He needed a costume that transcended these distinctions. His experiments continued. He arrived in Madras in 1915 traveling third class and wearing a loose shirt and pair of trousers (Erikson 1969:279). He was photographed in Karachi in 1916 wearing a dark-colored hat similar in shape to what has become known as a "Gandhi cap" (Gold 1983:59). Again during the Kheda *satyagraha* in 1918 he was photographed in his Kathiawari turban. At the 1919 Amritsar Congress he first wore the white homespun "Gandhi cap." Some believe it was derived from South African prison garb (Ashe 1968:199). The cap also resembles some worn by Muslims and it may be important that Gandhi began to wear it during the campaign to support the Caliph of Turkey, a campaign important to Gandhi for its promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity. The cap, which Gandhi discarded two years later, was to become part of the uniform of Indian nationalists (see Cohn, this volume).

Gandhi's final costume change took place in 1921 when he began his national program for the revival of handmade cloth. *Khadi* (homespun) was scarce and expensive, so he urged his followers to wear as little cloth as possible:

> I know that many will find it difficult to replace their foreign cloth all at once. . . . Let them be satisfied with a mere loin cloth. . . . India has never insisted on full covering of the body for the males as a test of culture. . . . In order, therefore, to set the example, I propose to discard at least up to the 31st of October my *topi* (cap) and vest, and to content myself with only a loin cloth, and a *chaddar* (shawl) whenever found necessary for the protection of the body. I adopt the change, because I have always hesitated to advise anything I may not myself be prepared to follow. . . . I consider the renunciation to be also necessary for me as a sign of mourning, and a bare head and bare body is such a sign in my part of the country. . . . I do not expect co-workers to renounce the use of the vest and the *topi* unless they find it necessary. . . . (29 September 1921, quoted in Jaju 1951:98).

Later recalling the same event, Gandhi added he "divest[ed] [him]self of every inch of clothing [he] decently could and thus to a still greater extent [brought himself] in line with the ill-clad masses . . . in so far as the loin cloth also spells simplicity let it represent Indian civilization" (quoted in Jaju 1951:99). Gandhi had completely rejected the English gentleman and replaced him with the Indian ascetic, the renouncer, the holy man. When he visited the Viceroy in 1921 (and still later, when he attended the Round Table Conference in London in 1931 and visited King George and Queen Mary at Buckingham Palace) wearing his *mahatma* garb, nothing could match the communicative power of a photograph of Gandhi in loincloth and *chadar* sitting among the formally attired Englishmen. He communicated his disdain for civilization as it is understood in the West, his disdain for material possessions, his pride in Indian civilization, as well as his power—an ordinary man would not have been granted entry. By dealing openly with a man in *mahatma* garb, the British accepted his political position and revealed their loss of power.

The communicative power of Gandhi's costume was, however, uniquely Indian. Paradoxically, as his popularity grew, the messages he brought to the Indian public in his speeches and writings had increasingly limited range. Gatherings were huge, running to a hundred thousand or more. Only in the cities were public address systems available to him. Most people who went to see him could not hear him. Even if they could hear him the Gujarati or Hindustani or English in which he spoke could not be understood by many, sometimes most, of his audience. In a nation about three-quarters illiterate, his writings were available to still fewer.

Gandhi needed another medium through which to communicate with the people of India. He used his appearance to communicate his most important messages in a form comprehensible to all Indians. Engaged in the simple labor of spinning, dressed as one of the poor in loincloth and *chadar*, this important and powerful man communicated the dignity of poverty, the dignity of labor, the equality of all Indians, and the greatness of Indian civilization, as well as his own saintliness. The communicative power of costume transcended the limitations of language in multilingual and illiterate India. The image transcended cultural boundaries as well. His impact on the West was enhanced by his resemblance, in his simplicity of dress and his saintly manner, to Christ on the Cross.

In India, visual communication has a unique force. The sight of the eminent or holy blesses and purifies the viewer; the experience is called *darshan*. People came, literally, to *see* Gandhi. Through *darshan*, the power of Gandhi's appearance surpassed his message in words. "For the next quarter of a century, it was not only for his message that people came to him, but for the merit of seeing him. The sacred sight of the *Mahatma*, his *darshan*, was almost equivalent to a pilgrimage to holy Banaras" (Nanda 1958:213).

During this same period, Gandhi was experimenting with the economics of cloth production. Gandhi recalled: "It was in London in 1908 that I discovered the wheel. . . . I saw in a flash that without the spinning wheel there was no *Swaraj* [self-government]. But I did not then know the distinction between the loom and the wheel, and in *Hind Swaraj* used the word loom to mean the wheel" (quoted in Jaju 1951:1). "I do not remember to have seen a handloom or a spinning wheel when in 1908 I described it in *Hind Swaraj* as the panacea for the growing pauperism of India. In that book I took it as understood that anything that helped India to get rid of the grinding poverty of her masses would in the same process also establish *Swaraj*. Even in 1915 when I returned to India from South Africa, I had not actually seen a spinning wheel" (Gandhi 1957:489). By the time Gandhi returned to India in 1915, cloth production had become central to his program.

Like most leaders of the nationalist movement, Gandhi thought the reindustrialization of India to be of paramount importance, but unlike most of them he was opposed to mechanized industry, which he viewed as a sin perpetrated on the world by the West. He wanted to revive artisanry. From the establishment of Phoenix farm in 1904, Gandhi had committed himself to the simple life of labor. Machines were labor-saving devices that put thousands of laborers out of work, unthinkable in India where the masses were underemployed. Factory production facilitated the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few big capitalists, and transformed workers into "utter slaves."

Gandhi selected Ahmedabad, the Manchester of India, as the site for his settlement because this "great textile center was best suited for experiments in hand-spinning and weaving which appeared to him the only practicable supplementary occupations for the underworked and underfed masses in the villages of India" (Nanda 1958:134), and ". . . as Ahmedabad was [also] an ancient centre of hand-loom weaving, it was likely to be the most favourable field for the revival of the cottage industry of hand-spinning" (Gandhi 1957:395). Erikson, who has written so brilliantly on the early years in Ahmedabad, observes that "Gandhi blamed the disruption of native crafts [not only for the poverty of India, but also] for the deterioration of Indian identity. He was soon to elevate the spinning wheel to significance as an economic necessity, a religious ritual and a national symbol . . . Gandhi wanted to settle down where both tradition and available materials would permit him and his followers to build a community around the cultivation of spinning and weaving" (Erikson 1969:260).

By the time he settled at Ahmedabad his goal for India was the achievement, through *satyagraha*, of the reduction of poverty, disease, and immorality, and the restoration of dignity. Spinning offered solutions to all these problems. The English had destroyed the greatest cotton producer in the world in order to protect their own industries from competition, to create a source of raw materials not available in the British isles, and to make a ready market for their finished products. Gandhi sought to restore India's lost supremacy, to revive this "second lung" of India (the first was agriculture). His reasoning was simple: If Indians returned to the production of their own cloth there would be work for millions of unemployed, Indian wealth would not be taken to England and Japan, and Indians would again be their own masters (See Jaju 1915:8). "*Swadeshi* is the soul of *Swaraj*, *Khadi* is the essence of *Swadeshi*" (Gandhi quoted in Jaju 1951:12).

Until its demise in the 1820s, spinning had been a supplementary occupation of women all over the country. Weaving, by contrast, had always been a caste occupation. Though at first Gandhi concentrated on reviving spinning among women, he soon broadened his program. Spinning would become the leisure pursuit of all. The wealthy would spin as service; the poor to supplement their incomes. Through spinning, India would be able to clothe itself, and thereby free itself from foreign exploitation and domination. Through spinning, all Indians, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, would be laborers, equal and united through their labor (see Bean 1988):

> Originally there was one specific objective: to give work and clothing to the half-starved women of India. To this was related from the beginning the larger objective of khadi—the cloth itself as a means of economic self-sufficiency (*swadeshi*) which in turn must inevitably produce self-government (*swaraj*). This progression, *Khadi* = *swadeshi* = *swaraj*, was Gandhi's incessant preachment for the rest of his life. . . . His genius had found a tremendous symbol which was at the same time a practical weapon . . . for the liberation of India. . . . The symbol he had found, the wheel itself, assumed enormous importance with the passage of time: it related itself to the whole of life, to God, to the pilgrimage of the spirit. . . (Sheean 1949:154,157,158, see also Bayly 1986).

Gandhi had returned from South Africa determined to wear handmade cloth. He brought a weaver to the ashram, but there was no hand-spun yarn available for the loom, so Gandhi began looking for a spinner. It was not until 1917 that his associate Gangabehn located spinners who would produce yarn to be woven at the ashram—if slivers, carded cotton for spinning, could be supplied to them. Until then, Gandhi had relied on machine-spun yarn from Ahmedabad mills for his looms, but he still had to get the slivers for hand-spinning from the mills. Gandhi's *khadi* had to be entirely handmade, so he asked Gangabehn to find carders who could provide the slivers. Gandhi "begged for [the raw] cotton in Bombay" (Gandhi 1957:492). Finally the entire process of making cloth could be done by hand.

At this time, Gandhi's *dhoti* was still of Indian mill cloth. The *khadi* manufactured at the ashram was only 30 inches wide. Gandhi "gave notice to Gangabehn that, unless she provided . . . a *khadi dhoti* of 45 inches width within a month, [he] would do with coarse, short *khadi dhoti*. . . . well within the month she sent [him] a pair of *khadi dhotis* of 45 inches width, and thus relieved [him] from what would then have been a difficult situation. . . ." (Gandhi 1957:493). Perhaps Gandhi was looking for an opportunity to change to a loincloth, a change he accomplished two years later. From 1919 on, he was clothed entirely in *khadi*, and instead of the turban, he began wearing the white *khadi* "Gandhi cap." *Khadi* was much too coarse for wrapping as a Gujarati turban.

In 1920 as part of the Non-cooperation Movement, the leaders of the Indian National Congress endorsed hand spinning and weaving, to supply cloth to replace boycotted foreign cloth and to engage the masses in the nationalist cause. In this they followed Gandhi, but they were by no means in full agreement with him. "Tagore argued that trying to liberate three hundred million people by making them all spinners was like urging them to drown the English by all spitting together: it was 'too simple for human beings.' Complaints came in against *khadi* as a material in the conditions of modern living. It wouldn't stand up to the wear and tear of a factory. It was too heavy. It was hard to launder and therefore unsuitable for children. Gandhi's answer was that with more skill there would be better *khadi*" (Ashe 1968:249).

Most nationalists disagreed with Gandhi's opposition to mecha-

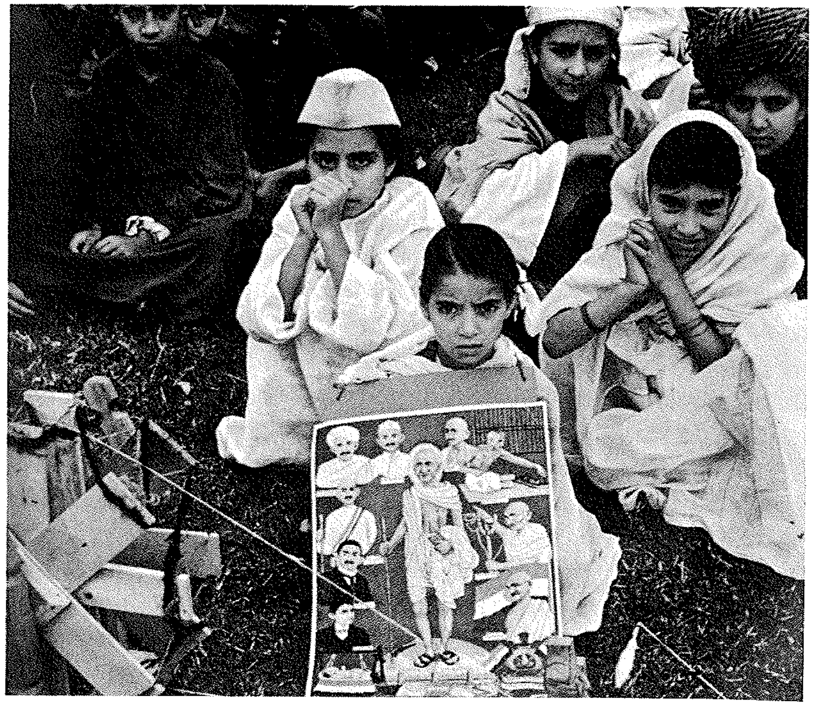

Figure 24. Children dressed in khadi *display a chromolithograph, of the sort used in India for veneration and worship, showing the stages of Gandhi's life expressed in sartorial transformations. Clockwise, starting from the lower left, we see Gandhi as a law student in London and next, still in Western dress, during the early years of his stay in South Africa. For his* satyaghraha *campaign in South Africa, he devised his first non-Western costume. At the upper left, Gandhi wears the turban of the Gujarati peasant as part of the distinctly Indian garb he chose for his return to India. He soon replaced the turban with a non-regional "Gandhi cap," adopted by his followers but abandoned by Gandhi in favor of the ascetic garb he wore from 1921 until the end of his life. Photo by Brian Brake from Magnum*

nized industry. Many, including Jawaharlal Nehru, believed industrialization crucial for India's economic well-being. Few felt Gandhi's love for the purity and simplicity of coarse white *khadi*. Jawaharlal Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit thought *khadi* rough and drab. She felt deprived to have to wear a wedding sari of *khadi*, though it had been spun and woven by Kasturbai Gandhi and dyed

the traditional Kashmiri pink. Their father Motilal Nehru, at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee in Delhi during November 1921, burst out laughing when he heard Gandhi say that a person must know hand-spinning in order to participate in civil disobedience (Nanda 1958:235). In a letter to his son, the elder Nehru spoke of the *khadi* movement as one of Gandhi's hobbies.

Despite their disagreement, the Nehrus and other nationalist leaders supported hand-spinning and *khadi* because they recognized its symbolic and economic importance in the programs of *swadeshi*, boycott, and noncooperation. Mrs. Pandit noted the effects of wearing *khadi* "Gandhi caps," *kurtas*, and *dhotis*: She could no longer detect the social class of the visitors to her family's home. The uniform was a leveler, all Congressmen were the same (Pandit 1979:82). Accommodations were made for intranational variation: *dhotis* for Hindus, *pyjamas* (trousers) for Muslims, turbans distinctive for Sikhs or southern Brahmins. *Khadi*, the fabric of nationalism, transcended and encompassed these distinctions. Gandhi had taught his followers that costume can transform social and political identities. When Gandhi, clothed in loincloth and *chadar*, was received by the Viceroy Lord Reading in 1921, his followers (and his opponents) also saw that costume can be used to dominate and structure a social event. The most important result of those meetings was that Gandhi, wearing his opposition to English values and representing the people of India, was accepted to negotiate as an equal with the representatives of the British Empire in India. Gandhi forced the Empire to compromise its standards and thus demonstrated the power of the freedom movement he led.

By 1921, all Congressmen were dressed in *khadi*. The Governor of Bombay Presidency, C.R. Das, made *khadi* the uniform of civic employees. From July 1922, no member of Congress was allowed to wear imported cloth, and dues were to be paid in hand-spun yarn instead of cash. Hand-spinning and *khadi* had become a fixture in the freedom movement. Economic revitalization and self-government would be accomplished through mass organization, carried on by *khadi*-clad Congress workers promoting indigenous industries and mass action by teaching spinning to everyone, spreading the boycott of foreign products to the most remote villages, and preparing the way for mass civil disobedience.

Khadi had become, in Nehru's words, "the livery of freedom."

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